

XII.—*Remarks on the Habits of Birds which are Natives of the British Islands.* By THOMAS AUSTIN, Esq.Rook, *Corvus frugilegus*.

IN some districts of Ireland the rooks suffer severely during the interval between the sowing of the spring crops and the autumn, a season in which ploughing operations in a great measure cease, so that the supply of larvæ &c. no longer affords them subsistence. If the season should also prove dry at the same time, their sufferings are still more intense. During this period the famishing birds may be seen in the maritime districts skulking into corners in search of food, or greedily rooting up the grubs which are sometimes found in the heaps of sea-weed which have been collected for manure. They also spread themselves along the shores in quest of the small marine insects which lie scattered about, or if severely pressed by hunger, they pick up any stray offal that may fall in their way.

Sometimes they exercise the same instinct as the gulls and the gray-crows: when they meet with a molluscous animal, and which is not easily removed from its testaceous covering, the rook will then rise in the air until it attains a sufficient altitude for its purpose; it then lets its captive fall to the ground; the shock of striking on the hard surface is generally sufficient to fracture the shell, or to force the animal in part from its calcareous citadel, when it becomes an easy prey to the bird. Whilst the shell is falling the bird descends rapidly after it, lest some intrusive beak might bear the expected prize away.

This instinct is paralleled by the blackbirds and thrushes, who carry the snails they feed upon to some stone suited to the purpose, against which they continue to strike the shell, still retaining it partly in the beak, until it is sufficiently broken to enable the bird to seize on the contents. In plantations and other favourite haunts of these birds, piles of snail-shells so broken may always be seen along side-stones selected for the crushing process.

The strange fancies the rooks sometimes indulge in when founding a new colony afford amusing instances of what to a mere spectator would appear whimsicalities, but which no doubt the birds have good and sufficient reasons for observing.

In the spring of 1840, a number of rooks commenced building their nests in the low trees which ornament the approach to Mr. Allen's house at Ballystraw, near Duncannon, county of Wexford. After the labours of the day were over they would assemble in the trees, and apparently take up their station for the night; but no sooner did the twilight fade away than the rooks, as if distrustful of their safety, took flight to Kilmannock, the seat of Mr. Haughton, near Dunbrody Abbey. In this

manner they continued nightly to forsake the newly-planned colony until incubation commenced, when they were constrained to remain, or to spoil their eggs by leaving them. They preferred the former and reared a numerous progeny.

According to our notions of such matters, the trees here alluded to were, from their small size, totally unfit for the purpose to which the rooks had applied them; but they no doubt were led to select the spot from its proximity to good feeding-ground or other cogent considerations.

It is a remarkable fact, that the rooks which build in the trees at Woodstown, the seat of Lord Carew, on the Waterford side of Waterford Haven, always obtain their supplies of food for their young ones from the Wexford side. The distance they have to fly across the estuary is little less than two miles, yet do they invariably undertake the journey many times a day, even in the most tempestuous weather, and when it is difficult to make head-way against the storm.

#### Kestrel, *Falco Tinnunculus*.

This bird is partially insectivorous, and at particular seasons of the year it destroys great numbers of coleopterous insects. It is probable that the young kestrels, on their first development from the egg, are wholly supported on this kind of food.

I was induced to examine into this circumstance by observing the hawks at various times, particularly the breeding season, hovering and pouncing every instant on to the ground in a manner which convinced me that it could not be either birds or mice they were in pursuit of. I was for some time unable to conjecture what they could be so eagerly engaged in capturing, until by repeated observation I became convinced that some species of insect was the object of their solicitude. To place the matter beyond a doubt I procured several specimens, the stomachs of which were filled with the undigested bodies of coleopterous insects. Subsequently I had opportunities of examining some of their resting-places, when the fæces found there were composed almost exclusively of the antennæ, legs, elytra and other indigestible parts of beetles. These observations were repeated with similar results along the line of cliffs between the fine strand of Duncannon and Broom Hill Point, county of Wexford.

The fact of the kestrel feeding on insects has been frequently noticed before, but it is interesting to extend our observations in order to ascertain that the habit is general, and not a local peculiarity.

#### Land Rail, *Rallus Crex*.

A favourite food of the Land Rail is a small lizard (*Lacerta agilis*). I have frequently dissected rails in the autumn, and al-

ways found them to contain these reptiles in various stages of digestion.

Rails are exceedingly numerous in Ireland, though less so of late years than formerly. All the eggs of this bird which I have met with in that country, amounting to some hundreds, are of a dark colour, irregularly sprinkled over with large olive-coloured spots. But the eggs of the same bird obtained in England are, according to Mr. Hewitson, of a light ground, speckled with small olive-coloured spots. How can this circumstance be accounted for? Are they really varieties of the same bird, or can difference of food cause the difference in the colour of their eggs? Specimens of each may be seen in the museum of the Bristol Institution.

#### Stormy Petrel, *Procellaria Pelagica*.

The Stormy Petrel is frequently driven on to the Irish coast by severe weather, and may then be seen hovering over the foam along the margin of the sea, as if in search of food. The petrel, though possessed of great power of wing, is frequently overwhelmed and perishes by the fury of the tempest. After a stormy night in 1832, I obtained on the Wexford coast seven or eight dead specimens which had been washed on shore; and I saw several other birds which were more or less crippled, and which could have been readily captured had they been pursued.

Almost every winter the petrel may be obtained along the shores of the Irish coast, either by shooting the straggling and tempest-driven birds, or by searching along high-water mark for the stranded ones. It need scarcely be remarked that a lee shore is the proper place to look for them.

Kingsdown, Bristol, Nov. 29th, 1843.

### XIII.—*A List of the species of Myriapoda, Order Chilopoda, contained in the Cabinets of the British Museum, with synoptic descriptions of forty-seven new Species.* By GEORGE NEWPORT, Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, Pres. Ent. Soc. &c.

THE *Myriapoda* have been more neglected by naturalists than almost any other division of the Articulata. This neglect has arisen in part from the uninviting appearance of the objects, and in part also from the very great similarity of the species. Most of the families and genera are recognised by well-marked characters, but the species so nearly resemble each other that it is exceedingly difficult to distinguish them. Very few of them were known to Linnæus, and many of those few were confounded by him under a single name. Dr. Leach, to whom we are indebted for laying the foundation of a truly scientific examination of this class, described but few species, most of which were British, but even